

“The Cradock Letter”

Letter to Johannesburg District Party Committee

Moses M Kotane

Cradock, 23 February 1934

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Dear Comrades,

In my last report I promised my conclusions arrived at from my recent observations. What I have learnt from my recent study has further strengthened my old conclusions (known only to a few leading elements in our Party) that our Party has and is suffering owing to being too Europeanised. That the Party is beyond the realm of realities, we are simply theoretical and our theory is less connected with practice. If one investigates the general ideology of our Party members (especially the whites), if sincere, he will not fail to see that they subordinate South Africa in the interests of Europe, in fact, ideologically they are not S Africans, they are foreigners who know nothing about and who are the least interested in the country in which they are living at present, but are valiant 'servants' of Europe. They are 'revolutionaries' and 'Bolsheviks', their hobbies are 'the German situation and the Comintern, Stalin and Trotsky and 'the errors of various communist parties.'

But such conception is just the opposite of Bolshevism. But we are living in a culturally backward Africa - Africa is culturally or economically backward. The oppressed and exploited people of Africa are without the 150 years of organisational tradition possessed by the European working class. The European (the term European is used in its correct sense - not for white), language is therefore not blindly applicable for S Africa. In Europe self-consciousness (class) has developed immensely whilst here national oppression, discrimination and exploitation confuses the class war and the majority of the African working population are more national conscious than class conscious.

Socialism, the proletarian revolution to our rural population (the majority) is but a vague expression which sounds more as a dream than a reality, to them it sounds like the 'land of Canaan' which can be 'attained only after death.'

The Independent Native Republic which in essence means a bourgeois republic, but which the S African (owing to the objective conditions), must necessarily presuppose a democratic workers and peasant republic, has different premise, language and attitude to that of the proletarian dictatorship and socialist revolution and it is precisely here where the crux of our argument necessarily 'revolves. It is from this premise that the author bases his arguments, that the general propaganda for a democratic workers and peasants republic cannot be identical

with that for the dictatorship of the proletariat. The identity or the identification of the two different historical stages is nothing but rank opportunism, a minimisation of our present task. We created imaginary bureaucracy sometimes where it did not exist, but just because our European comrades are fighting real bureaucracy. We have sometimes followed International Press Correspondence phrases and terminology in this country. We must learn from our European brothers but we should not lose sight of the fact that Europe differs historically, politically and economically with S Africa.

I started my observations in Queenstown among the African intellectuals, elements hostile to communism. But their hostility is due rather to ignorance. Among them I found some staunch nationalists, people who have not time for white people, but for their dependent economic position. Since then I am working among the non-intellectual section of the Native people. They are most interesting of the whole lot. They are revolutionary, but have not yet learnt the weapon of organisation and some of them are misled by ministers, they are religious, they all believe in the existence of God and in the bible, but disapprove of the venality of the leaders of the churches. They find proofs for everything they say in the bible. Personally they are rather nationalistic, but so far I always succeed in bringing them to my point of view, e.g. on the question of poor whites.

The Independent African National Congress has deeply entrenched itself in these districts, Cradock, Tarkastad, and its leaders are extremely popular. It would simply be tactlessness to denounce Tonjeni at present. He has won the confidence of his followers and many admire him. Up to now I have met two groups of his followers. First on Wednesday 14th instant (12) and Thursday 22nd instant (10) meeting again some on Monday night (26th). I am very pleased with these two groups so far and would be very pleased to see such serious people among our so-called Party members.

I think it is time I ended my 'sophisticated' arguments and gave some suggestions. My first suggestion is that the Party become more Africanised or Afrikanised, that the CPSA must pay special attention to S Africa, study the conditions in this country and concretise the demands of the toiling masses from first hand information, that we must speak the language of the Native masses and must know their demands. That while it must not lose its international allegiance, the Party must be Bolshevised, become South African not only theoretically, but in reality, it should be a Party working in the interests and for the toiling people in S Africa and not a party of a group of Europeans who are merely interested in European affairs.

With revolutionary greetings.

**Yours fraternally,
MOSES M KOTANE.**

Course: African Revolutionary Writing

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